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ABSTRACT

This report resulted from a 14-day Study Tour for American Experts in Youth Work arranged and financed by the Federal Republic of Germany Ministry for Youth, Family and Health which provided American youth workers with an opportunity to study the youth services structure and culture of West Germany. The structure of the West German Ministry for Youth, Family and Health is explained and responsibilities of the Ministry's five departments are discussed. The Youth Welfare Act is reviewed briefly and outstanding characteristics of youth work in the Federal Republic of Germany are identified. The German definition of youth, broader and more specific than the United States definition, is explained and age categories from babies to young adults are listed. Rights of individuals at different ages are described. Involvement of the church and trade unions with youth through residential youth facilities is discussed. The importance of the family is emphasized, differences between family life in the United States and Germany are explored, and marriage and family law in Germany is discussed. The report concludes that the quantitative and qualitative social services differences between the Federal Republic of Germany and the United States are significant and that the existing system in the United States is inefficient compared to that of Germany. (NB)

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AN AMERICAN SOCIAL WORKER IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

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AN AMERICAN SOCIAL WORKER IN THE FEDERAL REPUBLIC OF GERMANY

Paul Hill, Jr., Executive Director
East End Neighborhood House

Recently, I completed fourteen days as the guest of The Federal Republic of Germany. The fourteen days were spent as part of a Study Tour for American Experts in Youth Work. The Tour was arranged and financed by The Federal Republic of Germany Ministry for Youth, Family and Health.

The trip provided me with a professional and personal opportunity to visit and study the youth services structure and cultures of another country. The isolation of The United States and the lack of professional international exchange programs severely effects our sense of The World. The United States neanderthal mentality of other people and cultures has created "The Ugly American." The Tour afforded me the opportunity to visit four cities (Frankfurt, Berlin, Cologne, Bonn) in Germany and observe the operation of the youth structure and services at the national, state and local levels.

The Federal Republic of Germany is, as stated in its constitution, the basic law, a democratic and social state based on The Rule of Law. The State is under an obligation to provide social welfare for its citizens. This obligation is met by a very comprehensive system of social laws ranging from security for the aged and the infirm to children's and housing allowances, from saving and training aids to health and accident insurance. The importance The Federal Republic of Germany attaches to her social mission was obvious. It is also an attribute of The Social State based on The Rule of Law that the citizen can assert his/her rights. Social courts well versed in the often complicated laws ensure that everyone's rights are upheld, and, what is more, free of charge.

The Federal Republic of Germany structurally assumes the responsibility for youth, family and women. The Ministry for Youth, Family and Health is divided into five departments: 1. Central Administration and Planning; 2. Youth and Family; 3. Health Services; 4. Food Stuffs, Veterinary Medicine, and Consumer Protection; 5. Social Affairs. Department Two is subdivided into the sections, Youth and Family. The Federal Government's youth policy is firmly centered on the education upbringing of young people. It is directed towards improving educational opportunities, opportunities for co-determination and more effective protection from the present day risks to which young people are exposed. To these ends, it undertakes initiatives to combat unemployment among the youth, and above all to reform the laws concerning Youth Services and Social Services for the young. The Ministry aims to develop The Federal Youth Plan initiated by The Federal Government to promote all endeavors on behalf of The Youth Services. This promotional work is centered on political education, international and cultural youth work and also socio-economic projects for children and adolescents in need. In cooperation with The Regions (laender), the associations of local authorities and the voluntary youth service organizations, The Federation Ministry for Youth, Family and Health provides federal aid and support in the field of youth work and contributes to the sychronization of federal and regional youth plans vis-a-vis content, methods and financial provisions.

The legal basis for Youth Services and Social Services for The Young is The Youth Welfare Act, a Federal Law to which The Federal States (lander) have, as a rule, appended their own implementing statutes. The Act was passed in 1922 and received several amendments. Paragraph one of The act states that "Every young person has a right to be educated to achieve physical, mental and social fitness." This right is viewed not only in the light of the parental duty to educate, but rather as the young person's own right under The Basic Law, to the full development of his/her personality and thus also to his/her own right to education.

Alongside the statutory organizations, the voluntary social organizations and organizations of individuals play a significant role in youth work. The work of the voluntary bodies is recognized as a common right. Through their activities, they fulfill a public duty, for which The State has the final responsibility. It is thus an expression of this responsibility if The State enables the voluntary organization to fulfill these duties and support them adequately with public funds. The relationship between voluntary organizations and The State is, however, not a super and subordinate one, but a partnership. Such a partnership requires of The State that it recognizes the autonomy of the voluntary organizations and set guidelines on the consultation with its partners; it requires of the voluntary bodies that they support The State in the realization of the most important aspects of Youth Service as determined by The State in the framework of its overall responsibility for public welfare.

Outstanding characteristics of youth work in The Federal Republic of Germany are: Youth work places the needs and interests of young people at the center of its manifold varieties of activities, events and organizations; youth work belongs to the sphere of Youth Services and Social Services of The Young and not to education, although a strong interaction is manifest; of great significance is the "unity of youth services", behind which stands the claim that all socialization agents from Kindergarten to youth work and parent education, residential child care to social enquiry in juvenile cases may not be disassociated from their content and organizational and legal context.

In Germany, the definition of youth is broader and specific when compared to The United States.

Age 0-1 = Baby
1-6 = Young Child
6-14 = Child
14-18 = Young Person
18-21 = Adolescent
21-24 - Young Adults

At eighteen, the adolescent acquires all the rights and duties of an adult with the exception of criminal liability. If deemed advisable, in the individual case, he/she may still be judged and sentenced in accordance with Juvenile Criminal Law up to the age of twenty-one. However, at the age of fourteen, a young person can acquire partial liability in Criminal Law. For a first offense, he/she may be sentenced to perform some kind of service for the community. If the offense is repeated, he/she may be detained. In serious instances, a youth may be sent to a youth prison for a period up to ten years. A young person, at fourteen, may choose his/her religion and may opt out of religious instruction at school. At fifteen, one may ride a

moped; and at sixteen smoke in public.

Within The Federal Republic, The Church and trade unions are actively involved with youth through residential youth facilities. The mentally handicapped and children with maladaptive behaviors are provided services by The Catholic Church; also, through the century old Don Bosco Youth Movement, The Church is socially active.

The organization of The German Trades Union Congress was founded in 1948, and is open to all young trade union members up to the age of twenty-five. Safeguarding the rights and interests of young people as well as being a recognized youth organization requires of The Trade Union youth a special union-oriented policy for its youth work. Significant aspects are: Interesting young workers in union activities and encouraging their enrollment and participation, enlightening them about their place in society, to introduce them to politics, to gain their political cooperation, and to represent them in their particular claims on society in the field of Social and Youth Policy. In addition to these responsibilities, Trade Union youth must also encompass the defense of democracy, the struggle against fascist and militaristic influences, and must endeavor to work for understanding between nations. The Trade Union Youth has at present some 1,3000,000 members.

Of all the world's institutions, none is more important than the family. Over the last twenty-five years, trends in social changes have intensified: The elderly now make up an increasing proportion of the population. More wives and mothers are working full-time. More couples are getting divorced. More single-parents are raising families. More families are moving away from their roots, away from the support and cooperation of their aunts and uncles and grandparents who formed an integral part of the traditional extended family. Social pressures on The Family have become a way of life: Social acceptance of non-traditional patterns has been broadened; economic pressures have affected the work force, including wives and mothers; family planning methods and information have been made almost universally available; legal modifications have underlined divorce as a route for dissatisfied marriage partners to take.

Recently a Federal Judge in Los Angeles ruled "null, void, invalid and inoperative" California's law that women returning to their jobs after maternity leaves must be reinstated to their "same or similar" jobs. The reason for this decision was that The Law allegedly discriminates against men because men don't get pregnant. While it might sound ridiculous, this ruling is a serious setback for the rights of United States women and all working people and can help pave the way for further setbacks. It means that many women will have to choose between having children or keeping jobs. The rationale for the decision was that maternity leaves were the only disability covered by The Law, The Law discriminated against men.

Within The United States, there is no formally adopted woman's or family policy, and there is a reluctance to establish one. France, Great Britain, Canada, Cuba, Nicaragua and The Federal Republic of Germany have adopted formal family policy. Such policy seeks to reinforce the family by regulating economic relationships while, at the same time, setting out the rights and duties of parents and children.

In The Federal Republic of Germany, Article Three of The Basic Law provides women with the same civil rights as men and provides pregnant women special protection under The Maternity Law. The Maternity Law prescribes that women may not be given work that is damaging to their health and may not be dismissed on account of their pregnancy. They are also granted leave with full pay from six weeks before until, if they so wish, up to six months after confinement.

Most Germans want to be married and have a family. About eighty-three percent (83%) of the twenty-five to forty-five age group are married. The average age of marriage for men and women is twenty-five and twenty-three. Seventeen percent (17%) of all marriages end up in divorce, most of them after three years.

According to the Basic Law, marriage and the family have the special protection of The State. Consequently, Parliament has enacted laws which provide special tax concessions and other forms of assistance. The State lends a twofold helping hand to anyone with children--by the direct payment of a children's allowance for the second and additional child and by the granting of tax-free amounts in respect of every child. In this connection, foreign employees benefit just as much as domestic. Nor does this exhaust by far the aid for large families. Almost all social services are increased as the number of children becomes larger; the housing allowance, too. The Federal Railways Grant reduced fares to families with several children, and the official scheme for encouraging saving is graduated according to the number of children. In addition, students and pupils attending continuation schools are entitled to an educational allowance if their parents' income or assets are insufficient to pay for their education. They receive a monthly allowance from The State amounting to between sixty-four dollars and one hundred and seventy dollars.

Families also receive rent allowances and are protected as tenants. They benefit from housing under the social scheme, Family Holiday Centers and housing for old couples. Young people who marry and live in Berlin, receive a marriage loan. Low-income families receive National Assistance Benefits. If the family bread winner falls ill, he receives his full wage for the first six weeks off work. If he is unemployed, he receives unemployment benefit. If he is unable to work on account of incapacity or disability as a result of ailment or accident, he receives a pension which increases depending on the number of children. If he dies, his widow and children receive a pension. Old-age invalidity and survivors' pension are automatically adapted to the standard of living.

Marriage and Family Law are constantly improved to place the housewife on a more equal footing with her husband. The sole criterion for divorce is the complete breakdown of the marriage; it does not depend on the guilt of either party. The Judge determines whether the marriage has broken down, not why. The party best able to care for the children and their education is granted custody. The one who is financially better off--in most cases the husband--will help the other until he or she has found work or completed vocational training. Pension entitlement acquired during marriage will be divided. Married couples are able to choose which surname they wish to adopt--that of the husband, of the wife, or both.

The Law provides for housewives who want to return to work. Under the Labor Promotion Law, they can be retrained or take further training courses, and they receive assistance to ease the transition to working life. They may also take courses at technical schools if they have worked for eight years previously. In this connection, a housewife's work is rated as an occupational category--a housewife with children works a sixty hour week looking after her family and doing housework.

The number of married women with jobs has increased in recent years. However, they can call upon a number of services, especially those which involve child care. A model program carrying the title "Day Mothers" has been introduced with a view to examining the possibilities of caring for such children in family-like surroundings. Other facilities are available to working mothers within the framework of The Statutory Health Insurance System. Either the father or the mother, for instance, can take up to five days off per year for child (up to eight years) in need of home care. The Health Insurance Institution makes up any loss of earnings. It will provide home help where the mother's in the hospital or receiving curative and convalescent treatment. Children attending Kindergarten, pupils and students are automatically covered by The Statutory Health Insurance System. In The Republic, ninety-nine percent (99%) of Germans are either privately (5%) or statutorily (94%) insured against illness.

In summary, The Federal Republic of Germany was impressive. Far from perfect, the existing Social State has the welfare of its population structurally defined. The coordination and support of social programs at the national, state, local, trade and religious levels are complementary.

The structural responsibility for youth, family and health was evident. The definition of youth was specific and supported by uniform Youth Law and Services Policy. The salary scale and civil servant status of social workers and teachers reflected a higher esteem for such professionals in Germany than The United States.

Through the ideology of subsidarity, the involvement of the government in the lives of the German population is nothing more than a healthy extension of themselves. Only in The United States do Americans have a programmed fear of Government and have transformed it into a belief that The Government is basically evil. The carry over of this belief has stigmatized federally administered social programs.

The distribution of wealth is far from being equal in The Federal Republic of Germany; however, the disparity between the have and have nots is significantly less than in The United States. The distribution of Federal funds to The States is much higher and equal in The Republic than The United States; this is primarily due to the social welfare mentality of The German State and that less than ten percent (10%) of the national income is used for the military budget. Thanks to The United States, they are able to be much more supportive of their populations social needs. In The United States, the defense budget has a stranglehold on economic and social service allocations to The States. The decreased funding allocations to states have had a crippling effect when compared to the increased responsibility shift from Washington to the state capitals.

The homogeniety of the German society has contributed to less complex problems than the American salad bowl dynamics. However, considering its positive side and advantage, the Republic is not free of issues and problems. Serious issues relate to demographic and population problems--high population density; rapidly decreasing family size; unemployment; deployment of United States missiles; racism as related to the largest minority group--Turks; neo-nazism; sadistic pronography; restless youth; and the quest for a national identity.

The German people, history and culture were interesting. The Germans are a proud, organized and ultra clean people in search of a national identity. The experiences of World War II with the division and occupation by The Allied Forces, has resulted in two states with Berlin existing as an island. It is probably true, that The Germans, a people fragmented for long stretches of their history, have always brooded over the question of their identity more than other peoples have. But this is especially true today. The question asked long ago by Schiller--"Where is Germany? I don't know where to find it!"--is no less perplexing than it was in his time. To what does the patriotic German owe his loyality these days? To the Federal Republic which in its own constitution is described as a transitory creation? The excitement of the economic miracle and the hopefulness of detente have given way to economic woes and the consequences of Ronald Reagan's paranoid anti-Soviet foreign and military policy. With the serious economic strains and the marked deterioration of relations between the super-powers, Germans have become less sure of themselves and more aware of their vulnerability. This has made them both more introspective and more self-assertive.

It became obvious after the first week of The Study Tour, there existed a gnawing German anxiety about not being the masters of their own fate --and what appears as a growing desire to do something about it. The Europeanization of Europe, the withdrawal of both Germanys from military blocs and union through neutralization would be a natural progression of such a desire. The German People and Social System is bonded by a political and cultural raison d'etre. The Social Service structure per youth and family is not predicated on social pacification and dependency. The focus is preventive and supportive, utilizing a political awareness and cultural base. The quantitative and qualitative Social Services differences between The Federal Republic of Germany and The United States is significant. The lack of funds, coordination, purpose, direction and structural responsibility, plague youth, women and Family Services in The United States. The United States may far out distance other western countries and Japan in technology, but relative to Social Services the existing system is inefficient, programmed to fail and anti-community.